

St. Isaac the Syrian: On the Reading of Scripture



St. Isaac the Syrian, 7th century ascetical Saint and Bishop of Nineveh

Icon Source: <http://www.ombksea.org/2012/10/saint-isaac-the-syrian-on-the-proper-way-to-face-sorrows/>

**St. Isaac the Syrian, from Homily 1,
The Ascetical Homilies, 2nd Revised Edition,
Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA, 2011,
p. 115-117:**

There is nothing so capable of banishing the inveterate habits of licentiousness from our soul, and of driving away those active memories which rebel in our flesh and produce a turbulent flame, as to immerse oneself in the fervent love of instruction, and to search closely into the depth of the insights of divine Scripture.

When a man's thoughts are totally immersed in the delight of pursuing the wisdom treasured in the words of Scripture by means of the faculty that extracts understanding from them, then he puts the world behind his back and forgets everything in it, and he blots out of his soul all memories that form images embodying the world. Often he does not even remember the employment of the habitual thoughts which visit human nature, and his soul remains in ecstasy by reason of those new encounters that arise from the sea of the Scripture's mysteries. And again, even if the mind [*only*] floats on the surface of the waters, that is, of the sea of the divine Scriptures, and its perceptions cannot fathom the great depth so as to be able to grasp all the treasures in its deep, yet even this practice in itself, by the power of its fervent love, will suffice the mind firmly to pinion its thoughts by a single thought of wonder, and to prevent them from running to the body's nature, as one of the God-bearing Fathers said. And this he says is because the heart is feeble and cannot sustain the evils that it encounters from inner and outer warfares. And you know that an evil bodily thought is oppressive. If the heart is not occupied with study, it cannot endure the turbulence of the body's assault...

Be wise, then, and lay the fear of God as the foundation of your journey, and in but a few days it will bring you before the gate of the Kingdom with no windings on the way.

Do not, like the pupils of teachers, over-scrutinize words that are written from experience for the fostering of your way of life, which render your soul great because of the greatness of the insights found within them.

Discern the purport of all the passages that you come upon in sacred writings, that you might immerse yourself deeply in them, and might fathom the profound insights found in the composition of enlightened men.

Those who in their way of life are led by divine grace to be enlightened are always aware of something like a noetic ray running between the written lines, which enables the mind to distinguish words spoken simply from those spoke with great meaning for the soul's enlightenment.

When a man reads in a common way lines that contain great meaning, he makes his heart common and devoid of that holy power which gives the heart a most sweet taste through perceptions that awe the soul.